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How to improve oral skills by overcoming speaking anxiety

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Trabajo de Fin de Máster

How to improve oral skills by overcoming speaking anxiety

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ABSTRACT

Speaking has become one of the most important skills, especially when learning a foreign language. However, many students suffer from anxiety and this problem can affect both their learning process and the development of the oral skill. The aim of the proposal designed throughout this project is to overcome this speaking anxiety, following an analysis of previous studies on the topic. The activities developed in this proposal, intended for students of 4th of E.S.O., strive for the creation of a positive environment in the classroom, which will help students reach their goal. Feedback is also an important aspect of learning a foreign language and, through it, the teacher will have the role of guiding the students during the proposal, reducing their speaking anxiety while strengthening their knowledge of the foreign language. This project also aims to be the starting point for a future implementation of the proposal in the English classroom.

Key words: anxiety, English as a foreign language, feedback, innovation proposal, speaking anxiety, oral skills, positive environment

RESUMEN

Las habilidades comunicativas se han convertido en uno de los aspectos más importantes, especialmente en lo relativo al aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera. Sin embargo, muchos estudiantes sufren ansiedad y este problema puede afectar tanto su proceso de aprendizaje como el desarrollo de la habilidad comunicativa. El objetivo de la propuesta diseñada a través de este proyecto es el de superar esta ansiedad al hablar, siguiendo un análisis de estudios realizados previamente sobre este tema. Las actividades que se desarrollan en esta propuesta, la cual está dirigida a estudiantes de 4º de la E.S.O., buscan la creación de un entorno positivo en el aula, lo que ayudará a los estudiantes a alcanzar esta meta. La crítica también es una parte fundamental de aprender una lengua extranjera y, a través de ella, el profesor adoptará el rol de guiar a los estudiantes a lo largo de la propuesta, reduciendo su ansiedad al hablar y reforzando a la vez sus conocimientos de la lengua extranjera. Asimismo, este proyecto busca ser el punto de partida de una futura implementación de la propuesta en la clase de Inglés.

Palabras clave: ansiedad, entorno positivo, *feedback*, habilidades orales, Inglés como Lengua Extranjera, miedo a hablar, propuesta de innovación

1. INTRODUCTION AND JUSTIFICATION

Nowadays, it can be said that English is the most important language in the world, given the fact that it is spoken by more or less 20% of the population (Lyons, 2017); most of these speakers do not speak English as their first language. That is why the academic system and the legislation try to emphasize the relevance of learning English as a second or foreign language. It is not only useful as a lingua franca when communicating, but also important when traveling, getting in touch with other cultures, broadening your horizons and even accessing different sources, as most content is found to be in English. However, it is necessary to understand that there are different factors which can prevent students from achieving proficiency when it comes to learning and, especially, speaking this language: anxiety is one of them.

Anxiety is an issue which many students experience, and it might hinder their capacity of learning English and performing well in the English as a Foreign Language classroom. Although it is an obstacle which many people suffer from, adolescence is a period where students are more vulnerable than ever to suffering from anxiety or other problems. These are the years in which the student will be asked to speak in front of their peers and when the oral skill will start being evaluated alongside the rest of skills. Many of these students might feel as though they are not prepared enough to speak in front of their classmates, either regarding grammatical aspects, vocabulary or pronunciation. This, together with their own predisposition to anxiety and the changes they are undergoing during the difficult period of adolescence might develop in a fear of speaking during the EFL class. The problem this causes when aiming for proficiency is not always addressed and it can worsen and become an issue in the future: not only when speaking in the foreign language but speaking in public altogether.

The proposal that has been designed in this project aims for students to lose this fear and anxiety in the EFL classroom and, furthermore, developing their oral skills. It also emphasizes feedback as an important affective filter that can be positive for the students and help them overcome their weaknesses, but also know their strengths.

The first section this project will deal with are the objectives of the proposal and what aims to be achieved through its development. Before explaining the proposal, there will be a review of literature related to the topic of adolescence and anxiety and the importance of the speaking skill, as well as a survey of different studies that have dealt with the subject of anxiety when speaking in the EFL classroom before. Taking this information into account, the innovation proposal is explained by describing its objectives, methodology, how the proposal will take place, the role that is expected of the teacher and the assessment criteria. To conclude, there will be a discussion regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal, as well as the conclusions extracted from its development.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives that aim to be achieved throughout this project are the ones listed below.

Main objective:

- To design an intervention proposal directed to students of 4th of Compulsory Secondary Education to help them overcome speaking anxiety in the English as a Foreign Language classroom. This will lead them to improve their speaking skill.

Specific objectives:

- To review other authors and experts' definitions of anxiety and the causes and consequences of this problem with a broader scope.
- To find the origin of adolescents' anxiety through the study and revision of acknowledged theories and authors in the field.
- To find ways to reduce students' anxiety when facing situations where they are required to speak in public.
- To use the theories reviewed and the conclusions obtained as a base to design an intervention proposal.
- To design a didactic unit conceived to overcome the type of affective filter that might be preventing students from acquiring oral skills and use the teacher's feedback as a positive affective factor as a contrast.
- Conceive a project devoted to developing the students' oral skills through activities that help them overcome the anxiety they might feel, taking the information previously gathered into account.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following theoretical framework deals with the main topics related to the reason behind this thesis: overcoming speaking anxiety during adolescence. It reviews literature related to several points that will try to explain the difficulties of this period and the significance of the affective filter. This way, section 3.1 deals with the changes adolescents undergo throughout these years –cognitive, physical and emotional– and how they can affect these students. In section 3.2 it is explained that emotional support is a key aspect when teaching teenagers, and how teaching through emotions can be beneficial. In relation to this, section 3.3 points to the importance of feedback as a way of assessment both, for the teacher and the student. The importance of developing the speaking skill is mentioned in section 3.4, addressing how relevant it is nowadays in comparison with the rest of the skills. Section 3.5 confronts the subject of the fear of speaking in public and what the causes and consequences of it may be. Finally, section 3.6 reviews some alternatives to overcome this negative affective filter when teaching a second language.

3.1 The adolescent features

First of all, it is necessary to take into account the target population of the present project. Dahl (2004) defines adolescence as “that awkward period between sexual maturation and the attainment of adult roles and responsibilities” (p.9); this quotation aims at summarizing the beginning of the period, more related to biological changes associated with puberty, with a more social approach to the term. As stated by Yurgelun-Todd (2007), adolescence is a ‘critical period for maturation’ of different processes that will later develop into higher cognitive functions and behaviors that the person will understand as their personality. The different changes experienced during this period affect not only the cognitive functions of the teenager, but also their emotional capacity, which will be crucial for the development of the modulation of the different emotions (Yurgelun-Todd, 2007). Likewise, the physical changes suffered during the teenage years will affect how adolescents see themselves and, thus, how they present themselves to the world. Furthermore, although external

forces can also have an influence, we need to establish a connection between the behavior of adolescents and their biological development (Dahl, 2004).

3.1.1 Cognitive features

Some of the most important changes during adolescence are those related to the development of the individual's cognitive processes. Dahl (2004) addresses the fact that there are some clear changes during puberty concerning the learning of languages, so it is fairly safe to say that cognitive development is key during these years. Yurgelun-Todd (2007) points to "improvements in cognitive processing speed and intellectual functioning" (p.251) and explains that higher executive functions such as "abstract thought, organization, decision making and planning, and response inhibition" are developed (p.251).

Although there is little change in the brain after the first years of childhood, there are some subtle changes worth mentioning. In this manner, Giedd, Blumenthal, Jeffries, Rajapakse, Vaituzis, Liu, Berry, Tobin, Melson and Castellanos (2001, as cited in Yurgelun-Todd, 2007) mentions the peak and decrease in gray matter suffered by teenagers, which Blakemore (2012) points out that leads towards the strengthening of the remaining synapses in the prefrontal cortex. This author also explains that the increased myelination might be associated with these improvements in cognitive processing that happen during the adolescent period. It has also been observed that teenagers have a different way of processing information, using different areas than those used by adults; nevertheless, some authors signal that this fact is not always age-related (Yurgelun-Todd, 2007). Dahl (2004) mentions that cognitive developments are not always age-exclusive and continue long after this period. In addition to this, the changes located in the limbic region of the brain, as explained by Blakemore (2012), are associated with the increase of risky behavior during adolescence. This region is in charge of processing emotions and the feeling of reward, which is hypersensitive to risk taking. The prefrontal cortex, which is also developing, will be responsible for stopping this kind of behavior when the person reaches adulthood (Blakemore, 2012).

Moreover, Dahl (2004) suggests that hormones are the cause of several changes experienced in the brain. In this sense, the increase of adrenal hormone levels during this period affects the brain, as it is also called a “weak” version of the sex hormone, while also triggering changes in the body like growth, changes in skin, etc. The author reiterates that most elements observed in cognitive development follow age and experience, rather than the time usually labelled as the onset of puberty. It is important to clarify that while maturation starts in the brain, there are some changes that follow that are the consequence of these processes, rather than the cause of them (Dahl, 2004).

3.1.2 Physical features

The physical growth experienced during adolescence is also crucial for understanding this age group. According to Stang & Story (2005), puberty marks the beginning of several physical changes, including the following: “sexual maturation, increases in height and weight, completion of skeletal growth accompanied by a marked increase in skeletal mass, and changes in body composition” (p.1). Although this process happens at a certain age, the adolescents present different ways of going through it, such as starting earlier or later or having it last longer. It also happens differently taking into account factors such as gender or ethnicity (Stang & Story, 2005). These sudden changes can also affect the way students portray and carry themselves, and thus the image they project, which might be a key part of the anxiety they may feel during this period.

3.1.3 Emotional features

During this period, it is necessary to also cover the maturation of emotional behavior, emotional capacity and affective modulation, and this emotional development is, sometimes, said to go hand in hand with the development of higher cognitive functions (Yurgelun-Todd, 2007). This is highly related to social relationships and a great part of this is due to the adolescent becoming better at reading emotional cues and social situations. Yurgelun-Todd (2007) links it to a ‘progressive frontalization of inhibitory capacity’, which is related to emotion-

processing regions of the brain such as the amygdala. However, emotional processing does not reach its peak during adolescence, but continues developing into adulthood; this prefrontal maturation, which was also mentioned above, plays a very important role in the development of several higher functions that establish themselves throughout these years.

3.2 Teaching adolescents through emotions

As adolescence is a period in which emotions are heavily present, either for good or bad reasons, adolescents' emotions need to be taken into account when facing the teaching process and designing the teaching programme. Ruzek, Hafen, Allen, Gregory, Mikami and Pianta (2016) mention that emotional support is key to high quality instruction, even connecting these emotions to the motivation of the students. Some of the most important points addressed by these authors focus on a certain attitude on the teacher's part, acknowledging the students and not taking the role of emotions for granted: showing genuine concern, respect, trying to understand the students' feelings and points of view. These interactions will succeed with the students' cooperation and engagement.

Ruzek et al. (2016) address the importance of emotions when dealing with adolescents. In this regard, they explain the relevance of creating experiences that are enriching for both, the students and the teacher. It is clear that emotions can never be put aside from teaching, especially, from teaching adolescents. Emotions are, definitely, a tool through which the teacher will be able to reach the students and acknowledge them.

3.3 The importance of feedback

Feedback is one of the most important parts of every activity that takes place in the classroom, especially when dealing with speaking tasks. Feedback is a way of assessment for the speaker, coming either from their peers or from their teacher (Chen, 2015). Tadjouri (2017) mentions that the input the students receive from those assessing them is vital to help them achieve proficiency in the second language; however, it can also lead to negative outcomes. The processing of

feedback is related to the affective filter hypothesis: those students with a lower affective filter will allow this input to affect their language acquisition positively and help them improve, while those with a higher filter will find it difficult to process it (Krashen, 1985 as cited in Tadjouri, 2017). Anxiety is one of the factors that affects this processing of feedback, and that is why an appropriate feedback is necessary for the student to overcome these difficulties and incorporate the input they receive to their language.

Regarding the role of the teacher when giving feedback, they have to be aware of the significance of their position as guiding figures for the rest of the class. That is why they will be in charge of making the student aware of what they need to improve. To do so, Rigby (2018) gives some important steps to take when giving feedback that have been adapted to the project at hand:

- Create a safe environment. Both the students and the teacher will be working on this regard from the very beginning of the proposal. It is a time when the student will feel vulnerable, so this needs to be taken into account.
- Listen to what the student has to say. The teacher has to engage the student in this aspect, asking questions such as “what are your thoughts on this?”, “do you have any questions?” or “do you need any help in this aspect?”. This way, they will feel less as if they were being judged or accused.
- Give them the opportunity to improve. It would be unfair for students to receive feedback without being able to put it into practice, so what their peers and teacher will say about their first presentation will be useful for their next one.

3.4 The importance of speaking

Speaking is a skill that aims to be mastered in order to achieve proficiency of a language and, lately, it has been gaining more and more importance. One of the reasons, as mentioned by Tadjouri (2017), is the fact that proficiency in speaking can help students get a better position in a future job. Progressively, speaking has become almost the most important out of the four skills –which comprise speaking, listening, reading and writing–, at least in terms of displaying the students’ knowledge about the language and their communicative skills. In this sense, Baker

and Westrup (2003, as cited in Tadjouri, 2017), state that students who are able to speak English, completely neglecting the other skills, may have a better chance of further education and gaining promotion in a job. However, we need to take into account that speaking is influenced by different factors cited in the following point, like the one we are focusing in throughout this research: age, which relates to the fact that adolescents have a specific perception of certain situations and can be linked to the psychological factor that is anxiety.

3.5 Adolescence and the fear of speaking in public

Feelings of anxiety have a special connection with the range of ages we are taking into consideration. This is due to all the factors that have been mentioned above, like the cognitive and emotional development, as well as the change in the physical image, and the consequences they have on the student. Gaibani & Elmenfi (2016) mention that this fear of speaking, in addition to the difficult teenage years taken into consideration, affects both the first and the second language. Chan & Wu (2004, as cited in Gaibani & Elmenfi, 2016) address the fact that speaking and developing communicative competence is nowadays one of the most important parts of learning a language, making it difficult for students who show a high language anxiety. Blood, G.W., Blood, I.M., Maloney, Meyer & Qualls (2007, as cited in Gaibani & Elmenfi, 2006) state that anxiety and self-esteem go hand in hand and that to separate them becomes a difficult task. In the same manner, they explain that age is a key aspect to consider when reviewing students' anxiety. The results of the investigation carried out by Gaibani & Elmenfi (2016) show that students with lower ages, that is, under 25 and on the teenage spectrum, face more anxiety when speaking publicly than those with higher ages. In addition to this, the authors found out that these learners do not always face difficulty with other skills. Nevertheless, they find it difficult to speak or are afraid of making mistakes. Finally, these authors indicate that students who have not mastered the language might, more often than not, face anxiety when speaking (Gaibani & Elmenfi, 2016).

3.5.1 Causes of speaking anxiety

Tadjouri (2017) mentions different reasons for this anxiety. In this sense, he distinguishes between personal and interpersonal causes.

A. Personal causes

1. **Personality:** As stated by Tadjouri (2017), anxiety is closely related to self-esteem and it will, more often than not, mean a distinct lack of confidence when the students need to express themselves. Moreover, as mentioned by McCroskey (2015, as cited in Toubot et al., 2017), there can also exist a predisposition to suffer from anxiety, either from a genetic point of view or because of a lack of social interaction experience. In other words, the students who had had a better exposure to social situations when they were children would have more chances to communicate, as well as better models and, consequently, would be less prone to get anxious in these situations.

2. **Lack of vocabulary:** This goes hand in hand with the mastering of the language. Tadjouri (2017) focuses on the fact that students might feel that they do not have the capacity to express certain ideas, given the fact that the vocabulary they are able to use in the target language might seem poor in comparison. Liu (2007, as cited in Tadjouri, 2017) explains that many students address the fact that they experience anxiety when they feel like they will not be able to convey a certain idea through their limited vocabulary. There is also a close relationship between anxiety and pronunciation, and most students sense it is the most important part of speaking the foreign language, even as far as connecting a bad pronunciation with a poor performance (Gynan, 1981 as cited in Tadjouri, 2017).

3. **Lack of preparation:** Most students consider they are not prepared enough to communicate spontaneously in the target language. In this respect, they believe they will perform better if they are given some time and tools to prepare what they want to transmit. In the same manner, they confess to feel nervous when they are asked to speak without previous preparation (Liu, 2007 as cited in Tadjouri, 2017).

4. **Lack of practice:** Students consider that they do not have enough practice in the classroom to be able to perform correctly. Tadjouri (2017, p.15) states that “in order to master the speaking skill of a foreign language, it is necessary to be

engaged in classroom interaction". Likewise, students who are less active in speaking activities experience a higher level of anxiety than those who are more active (Tadjouri, 2017). In this sense, McCroskey (2015, as cited in Toubot et al., 2017) points to the fact that when students have less opportunities to develop their communicating skills, they feel more anxious at the time of speaking.

5. Fear of being the center of attention: Most teenagers are afraid when speaking in front of a group of people, as they feel that they are being judged by their peers, which is closely related or could lead to embarrassment (Toubot et al., 2017). Liu (2007, as cited in Tadjouri, 2017) mentions that, due to the lack of vocabulary and preparation, most students are afraid of being the focus of attention, becoming anxious when they are asked to speak in front of the classroom.

6. Fear of making mistakes: Students are also very afraid of committing mistakes and pronunciation errors, which is closely related to a fear of receiving negative evaluations (Xiuqin, 2006 as cited in Tadjouri, 2017). Toubot et al. (2017, p.1939) mention that "students might feel afraid of their peers or teacher's negative evaluation".

7. Gender: Tadjouri (2017) points to the fact that females usually get higher marks than males regarding their speaking skills, suggesting that males may be more anxious in this regard than females. However, several studies show that female students experience more anxiety while speaking in front of the class, while both genders felt nervous and anxious when expected to speak publicly without any preparation. The author addresses the fact that in many cultures and for many years, the voices of women have been constantly silenced, and this will hinder their predisposition to speak in public and contribute to their anxiety (Tadjouri, 2017).

B. Interpersonal causes

1. Ridiculization: Students face a fear of being laughed at by their peers, which is interpreted as a form of negative evaluation. Liu (2007, as cited in Tadjouri, 2017) sees that the fear of their mates' laughter at their pronunciation, mistakes or errors makes them anxious to even try to speak in front of others.

2. Competition: Competition is inevitable in an academic system that grades students. Learners will always compare their results, and this is no different regarding their oral skills; this can be either positive or negative. Some positive aspects, as mentioned in Lam, Yim, Law and Cheung (2001), relate to the fact that students are induced towards demonstrating their abilities. However, students can often feel pressured and avoid this challenge if they are not confident. Young (1991, as cited in Tadjouri, 2017) considers that it is likely that students can idealize others and see themselves as less-than, which will make them less likely to work towards proficiency.

3. Teachers' behavior: Also connected to negative evaluation, an inadequate correction and feedback provided by the teacher can also be a source of anxiety. Tadjouri (2017) mentions that excessively severe ways of correction when the learner makes mistakes or errors will lead to higher degrees of anxiety, which will lead to the student embarrassment and, once again, to his reluctance to participate in class. This is related to Toubot et al. (2017), where the concepts of 'test anxiety' and the students' fear of failure with the teacher as the figure that provides constant assessment are mentioned.

4. The classroom: According to Tadjouri, 2017, "the impact of audience, time, and context" (p.19) are some of the factors affecting the student in this area.

3.5.2 Consequences of speaking anxiety

To explain this, Tadjouri (2017) talks about different levels of anxiety during communication: low, medium or high. Those students undergoing low levels of anxiety will control it and be able to perform, as this anxiety does not persist throughout all the stages of their speech delivery (Wrench et al., 2012 as cited in Tadjouri, 2017). Speakers with a moderate level of anxiety will, most likely, have their performance affected: they might delay their homework, avoid intervening in class and even hide from the teacher (Horwitz et al., 1986 as cited in Tadjouri, 2017). Consequently, those students who suffer from a high level of anxiety, and subsequently, a lower self-esteem, will avoid situations that require them to speak

and will not acquire this skill as well as other students. This can even motivate them to stop speaking altogether.

The consequence of this is that the language learning process might be affected: Xiuqin (2006, as cited in Tadjouri, 2017) states that students will probably be negatively affected by the input they receive, as was mentioned above. The anxiety they feel will also hinder their acquisition of the speaking skill, as they will practice the language less than their peers and, thus, they will limit their capacity. As a result, the grades and achievements they earn will decrease and even lead them to dropping out. Their professional careers might also suffer in the future, as their anxiety can be a negative aspect when taking part in communicative situations and, and even prevent these people from adapting to different situations. This, as Tadjouri (2017) points out, is the reason why it is very important to find effective ways to reduce this anxiety or, at least, lower it to a point where they can cope with it and develop their oral skills.

3.6 How to reduce the affective filter in second language teaching

As it was mentioned above, the affective filter is a barrier when it comes to language learning, which affects most students at different levels. Thus, it is necessary to have it reduced so the student can develop their speaking skills. Robertson (2011) explains that the use of movies, videogames and music can help reduce the affective filter, reduce anxiety and motivate the student. Nevertheless, these are not always available in the classroom and, furthermore, there is a strict curriculum, which imposed by the educational legislation, needs to be followed and fulfilled. According to Robertson's study (2011), most of the students agree that their anxiety lowers when working in groups or pairs. The teachers also helped with this by introducing the activities in a way that they engaged with the students, and through treating the students with respect and in a friendly way and validating their answers (Robertson, 2011). This method seemed to appeal to the students and lower their anxiety towards speaking in public.

Rogers (1994, as mentioned in Harmer, 2001) also considers the fact that learners feel more engaged when what they are learning is personally relevant to them. This

may limit the range of language to which the students are exposed, so this method has to be adapted to the curriculum provided by the legislation. Harmer (2001) mentions the creation of an “unthreatening environment” (p.75) which will play an important role in the student’s development. Regarding the activities that could take place in the classroom, Harmer (2001) mentions some examples:

- Acting from a script: students can act out dialogues in the book or even those they have written themselves. Through acting, they can play different roles and explore different parts of language.
- Communication games: they can entail an information gap for the students to solve, the description of an image, games involving the students’ asking questions to each other... these games can be adapted into different contents and may foster students’ motivation.
- Discussion: students are often reluctant to giving their own personal opinion in front of the class. These discussions or debates can be scripted by the teacher, giving roles to the students, or can allow the different groups to discuss their position on the given topic beforehand, avoiding possible anxiety.
- Prepared talks: they allow students to present information about a topic of their choice or provided by their teacher. Although they are not spontaneous, they allow the student to lose the fear of speaking in front of their peers and they can even integrate their own personal tastes into the presentation.

4. PREVIOUS STUDIES

The subject of anxiety in connection with the speaking skill has been a topic of debate for the past few years and more so when it is focused on the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL). That is the reason why researchers over the past few years have been conducting studies about it, so as to find a way to lower this anxiety.

Tsiplakides & Keramida (2009) carried out a research through which they intended to find out the answer to three specific questions: the characteristics of the

students suffering from foreign language speaking anxiety, the sources of this anxiety and, finally, if the incorporation of project work and a supportive context can help them overcome it.

The aim of Tsiplakides & Keramida's study was to provide teachers methods that could be useful in reducing the anxiety of their own classroom. The participants for their research were fifteen students in the middle of their teenage years, between 13 and 14, of a lower secondary school in Greece. These students showed an intermediate level in English. The method they used for their research was based on the participation of the students with semi-structured interviews, group discussions and the direct observation of their performance.

As a result, they came to discover that six out of these fifteen students suffered from a high level of anxiety, mostly due to the fact that they were in fear of a negative evaluation from their peers and, overall, being perceived as less capable in the language than the rest of the class. The interventions implemented by the researchers focused on working in projects, thus feeling less targeted and more motivated, and establishing a supportive atmosphere in the classroom, which involves the relationship between the teacher and their students. The main focus is put on correcting the student's mistakes while also praising their accomplishments and trying not to undermine their self-esteem.

Another study regarding foreign speaking anxiety was that carried out by Örtzük & Gürbüz (2014). This research tried to assess the speaking anxiety experienced by 383 students of an English preparatory program in Turkey, with ages ranked between 17 and 22, that is, the last part of their teenage years. They were subjects to an interview in which they were asked directly about their foreign language speaking anxiety. The results obtained showed that more than 72 students suffered from a high level of speaking anxiety and that speaking in English was, for them, an anxiety provoking factor. They also pointed out to the situations in which they felt more anxious, and the reasons why they felt this anxiety. These situations have direct consequences on the development of the students' speaking skills and even their proficiency in the English language.

Table 1. Situations causing anxiety for students while they are speaking English.

Codes	Frequency
When I forget or cannot remember appropriate words	7
When I am not prepared in advance for speaking	9
When I cannot pronounce the words correctly	6
When I am exposed to immediate questions	7
When I have to speak in front of the class	4
When I cannot make sentences	5
When I know that my turn is coming	5

(Örtzük & Gürbüz, 2014, p.7)

Table 2. The reasons for foreign language speaking anxiety.

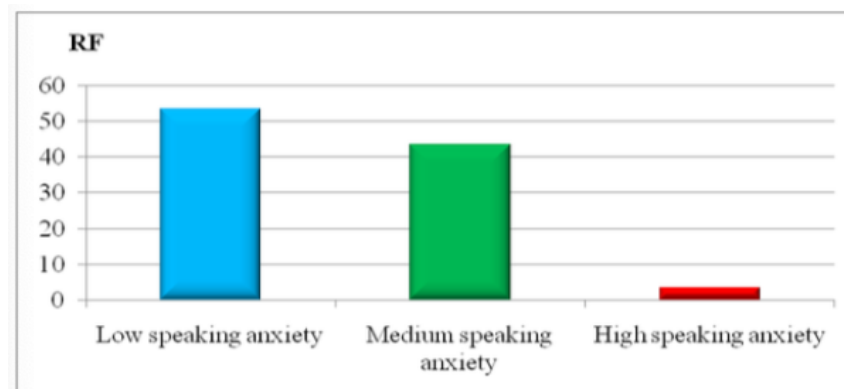
	Codes	Frequency
Educational	I do not have enough practice of speaking	2
	I did not have a good English education	1
Individual	Being afraid of making mistakes	3
	I am learning a language that I am not familiar with	7
	Lack of self-confidence for speaking English	3
	I do not know how to say what I think	5
Environmental	Classroom atmosphere	2
	To speak in front of others	2
	Potential reaction of the other students on my speaking performance	3

(Örtzük & Gürbüz, 2014, p.8)

On the other hand, Ansari's study (2015) focuses on the characteristics of the students that claimed to suffer from speaking anxiety, the sources for this anxiety and if the incorporation of a supportive atmosphere in the classroom can help overcome it. The participants of this study were 30 students aged between 17 and 19 at a college. The method used to assess this entailed semi-structured interviews, group discussions, question-answer sessions, interactions on situation-based spoken English and direct observation. The results that were observed pointed out that about 10 of these students suffered from English speaking anxiety. The causes for this also focused on the fear of negative evaluation from their peers and being perceived as less capable than them, while the sources of their problems were similar to those discovered in the study carried out by Örtzük & Gürbüz (2014). As their peers are one of the causes of their high affective filter, one of the ways to reduce it is a healthy and supportive context in the classroom, in which the teachers also have to be aware of their role, and the selection of activities that aim to lessen the students' anxiety, focused on group activities which might give them the chance to participate and games that encourage them to work in pairs.

Another important study was conducted by Tadjouri (2017). The participants of her research were 30 students in their second year of EFL at Abu Bekr Belkaid University, in Tlemcen; as well as five teachers, three of which having experience working as university teachers. It is interesting that teachers are assessed as well, as they are important factors in the anxiety suffered by students. The elements used to carry out this research were a test and a questionnaire for the students; and classroom observation and an interview with the teachers. The results of this study revealed that most of the students experienced a low level of speaking anxiety, a great part of them suffered from medium speaking anxiety and one of them had a high level of it. Talking about gender, they suffered from the highest level of anxiety of the two groups.

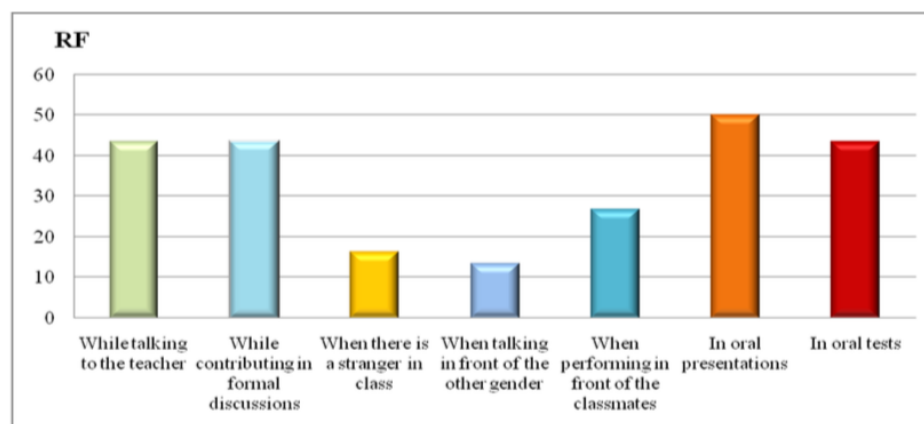
Table 3. Students' level of speaking anxiety.



(Tadjouri, 2017, p.34)

Regarding the situations in which they suffer anxiety, the one that stood out was when giving oral presentations, closely followed by oral tests and conversation to the teacher. The causes for this anxiety were similar to the ones mentioned in the previous researches, such as lack of competence or lack of preparation and being afraid of making mistakes.

Table 4. Situations of speaking anxiety.



(Tadjouri, 2017, p.40)

5. INTERVENTION PROPOSAL

5.1. Objectives

The following intervention is aimed at students of 4th of Compulsory Secondary Education, given the fact that students are at a difficult age between their purely teenage years and post-adolescence. The main objective to be achieved is to help these students overcome their speaking anxiety in the EFL classroom, as well as create a supportive atmosphere in the classroom and encourage their participation in the future as specific objectives.

The competences that are going to be developed throughout this project, as established by the Boletín Oficial de La Rioja in its order 19/2015, dated June 12th are the following:

- Linguistic Competence: As they will be acquiring another language and aiming to achieve proficiency.
- Social and Civic Competence: It is a key competence to take into account, regarding the fact that students will learn they can rely on the rest of the group.
- Sense of Initiative and Entrepreneurial Spirit: Students will improve their eagerness to take the initiative and speak up for themselves.
- Cultural Expressions and Conscience: When learning a language from another country, it is inevitable that the students raise their awareness about different cultures.

Regarding the contents that are going to be included in this proposal, they will be adapted from the ones found in the curriculum provided by the Boletín Oficial de La Rioja in its order 19/2015, dated June 12th. The ones that are the most relevant to the project are those belonging to the Oral Texts Production module.

Table 5. First foreign language contents in 4th of E.S.O.: Oral Texts Production

Planification	Execution
– Conceive the message in a clear way, identifying its main idea or ideas and its basic structure.	– Express the message with clarity and coherence, structuring it adequately and adjusting, in their case, to the formulas of every type of text.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Adequating the text to the addressee, context and channel, applying the register and structure adequate to each case. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Readjust the task or the message after valuing the difficulties and their resources. – Use their previous knowledge (using pre-made language, etc.) as support. – Compensate their linguistic lacks with linguistic or paralinguistic processes.
Linguistic processes	Paralinguistic processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Modifying words of similar meaning. – Defining or paraphrasing terms or expressions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Asking for help. – Pointing to objects or performing actions to clarify the meaning. – Using body language culturally appropriate.
Communicative functions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Starting and maintaining personal and social relationships. – Description of physical and abstract qualities of a person, object, place or activity. – Narrating past events, describing current states and situations and future events. – Asking and offering information, indications, opinions and points of view, advice and warnings. – Expressing understanding, certainty, doubt and guess. – Expression of interest, approval, appreciation, sympathy, satisfaction, hope, trust, surprise and their contraries. – Establishing and maintaining communication and speech organization. 	
Syntactic-discursive structures	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Oral lexicon of common usage related to personal identification; housing, home and environment; daily life activities; family and friends; jobs and occupations; free time, leisure and sport; trips and holidays; health and physical care; education and studying; purchases and commercial activities; food and restaurants; transport; language and communication; environment, climate and natural setting; and information and communication technologies. – Sound, accentual, rhythmic and intonational patterns. 	

5.2 Methodology

As it was mentioned above, the aim of this proposal is to help reduce students' anxiety in the EFL classroom, and that is what the methodology intends to do as well.

The objective is for the students to become the main focus of this project, with the teacher as a mere guide throughout this process, while also being supportive and using the affective filter to their advantage. However, it is important that the teacher

enhances the students' participation and their prominence during the course of these sessions.

Taking into account the teacher acting as a guide, it is significant that they make it clear that students can ask for help to solve their questions or doubts. Although they can work on them as a pair or group, accuracy is also important, so they will more likely aim for proficiency. As Tadjouri (2017) mentioned, students might have a fear of making mistakes of pronunciation and grammar, and they may be concerned with their lack of preparation, practice and vocabulary. Therefore, it is key that the proposal takes into account the contents that are being taught during their school year, integrating them and helping the students acquire them to their subconscious knowledge. Students will also learn that mistakes are a crucial step of learning and that they can always try again until they are accurate; the role of the teacher is to give the students emotionally-supportive feedback, as addressed in Ruzek et al. (2017). With respect to this, some sessions will be dedicated to feedback, where the teacher will have the opportunity of providing these students with a response to their performance.

Affective filter is one of the most important parts of this project. That is the reason why there will be sessions dedicated to feedback, when necessary: that is, after both presentations take place, as it can be seen in the program below. Feedback is closely related to affective filter in the way that it can be effective either in motivating the student or preventing them from developing their skills. As Gaibani & Elmenfi (2016) mention, students are often afraid of making mistakes and that is what could stop them from doing activities that require speaking in public. By adapting the role of the teacher into an emotionally supportive and available person, not above the rest of the students, this could be avoided. During these sessions, feedback will be used as a positive affective filter for the students, and they will be able to provide it to their classmates as well.

Moreover, one of the fears stated by Liu (2007, as cited in Tadjouri, 2017) is being the center of attention. Students might feel as if they are being judged by their peers and as if they are alone. The aim of the proposal is to develop the students' confidence in a progressive way, by working in pairs or groups through collaborative

learning until they feel they are ready to expose themselves individually. This will not only help the student feel less observed, but also to develop their social abilities and knowing more about their classmates by working with different people.

Thus, the methodology that is going to be used is based on these experts' findings about anxiety and their studies about different alternatives for it to lessen. The activities developed will be connected with the contents the students are dealing with throughout the year, as well as allow the students to be creative. Giving students the opportunity to give their own ideas is key regarding motivation and the relationship teacher-student. They will feel engaged and their ideas will be taken into account.

The proposal aims for the use of the target language during these sessions, which means that students will be asked to intervene in English at all times. Nevertheless, the mother tongue will be used when necessary for all the students to follow the session: if they find difficulties in conveying their thoughts in English, they may ask for a Spanish-to-English translation as a resource. It is important to keep in mind that the proposal is directed towards overcoming anxiety, so the students should feel as if they can ask for clarification at any time. That way, they will also learn that the teacher is a guiding figure, not just concerned with judging their performance. The main point is for the student to express themselves in English, so once they have solved their doubts, they can try to communicate in the target language once again.

This proposal would take place at the end of every unit, aiming for a total of eight sessions and an introduction to the project at the beginning of the academic year, with two more sessions in which students will present their work in front of their classmates. It can be adapted to the program of every high school as well as students of all ages, as the only requisite is for students to have finished the unit at hand and the activities can be adjusted. This way, the proposition may even serve as a way for students to revise the contents of the unit, integrate them with those already acquired in the past and to clarify those concepts that might still be unclear. Moreover, it would not take time from assessing activities, as it would constitute a percentage of the mark as well. The introductory session will dedicate some minutes to a questionnaire on the students' anxiety with the purpose of informing the teacher of the general feelings of the classroom. Additionally, at the end of the proposal

students will be asked to fill another questionnaire to check if they have found the sessions useful. They will also be assessing themselves according to the items of a rubric on their personal progress (found in 5.5.1), so they are aware of their own improvement.

5.3 Description of the proposal

There will be different activities taking place throughout the course of the proposal, that is, a total of nine sessions. These tables showcase the activities, how long they will be taking place, the group at hand, the materials used and a brief description of the activity. The units that will be reviewed through the proposal have been taken from the book *English File: Intermediate Plus* (Latham-Koenig & Oxenden, 2014) but its structure allows for it to be adapted to other books with different contents, as the activities taking place are versatile.

Table 6. Session 1 (50') – Introduction

Activity 1	Time	Group
Introduction	15'	All the students
Materials	Aim and description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Infographic about the proposal – Computer with projector 	<p>The aim of the activity is to introduce the proposal to the students. They will learn what they are being asked to do and how it will help them develop their speaking skills, whether they suffer from anxiety or not.</p>	

Activity 2	Time	Group
Questionnaire	10'	All the students
Materials	Aim and description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Computers with internet connection – Questionnaire (included in annex 2) 	<p>Students will fill a questionnaire, adapted from Tadjouri (2017), in which they will answer some questions about whether they feel anxiety or not, the situations that make them feel less comfortable, etc. They can even provide their own opinions about how the teacher could help them overcome their difficulties in relation to this aspect. This way, the teacher can not only know more about the students, but also listen to their own proposals.</p>	

Activity 3	Time	Group
Guessing game	25'	Pairs (rotating)
Materials	Aim and description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Pen – Paper – Guessing template found in annex 1 	<p>Students will be paired up and asked to make guesses about their classmates, which might be true or not. The pairs will rotate, so students will be able work with all of their peers and learn more about them. This is very important, so students get to know each other in order to achieve a good atmosphere when working in groups later on. It will also make the student feel more confident around their classmates when asked to speak, and this will ensure a better performance.</p>	

Table 7. Session 2 (50') – UNIT 1: Why did they call you that? / True colours

Activity 1	Time	Group
Introduction	15'	All the students
Materials	Aim and description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Student's book – Notebook 	<p>As a way to get the students attention, they will be asked to talk about something they did during the weekend and a place they would like to visit in the future and why. Then, they will give a brief summary of what they have learned throughout the unit as a group: they will cooperate and say what they remember, helping their classmates. These activities are very important to invite the students to start talking, so they will be ready for the rest of the activities in the session.</p>	

Activity 2	Time	Group
Who am I?	15'	Pairs
Materials	Aim and description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Flashcards 	<p>Students will be given a series of flashcards with the names of famous people or historical characters, which they will have to put on their forehead. By asking questions to their partner, they will have to guess who they are, practicing with the adjectives they have learned throughout the unit.</p>	

Activity 3	Time	Group
Guess the word	20'	Pairs
Materials	Aim and description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Computer with projector – Timer 	<p>Students will be paired up in different pairs as of the previous activity. The projector will show the pair a word that one of the partners has to guess while they are in a chair facing the class. Their partner will have to mention different words to help them guess it without mentioning the actual word. This way, students will develop their ability to create links between words; as the game will be timed, they will forget that they are playing in front of their classmates and will focus on guessing the words quickly. The activity will help students realize that they are capable of being the center of attention and still be able to speak.</p> <p>If there is no projector, the teacher can write the words on the blackboard.</p>	

Table 8. Session 3 (50') – UNIT 2: Pack and go! / Opening up

Activity 1	Time	Group
Introduction	10'	All the students
Materials	Aim and description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Student's book 	<p>As a way to get the students attention, they will be asked to talk about the last time they went on holidays: who they went with, where they went... and where they would like to go next summer and why. Then, they will give a brief summary of what they have learned throughout the unit as a group: they will cooperate and say what they remember, helping their classmates. These activities are very important to invite the students to start talking, so they will be ready for the rest of the activities in the session.</p>	

Activity 2	Time	Group
Choose one	15'	Pairs
Materials	Aim and description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Flashcards 	<p>The pairs will be divided into Student A and Student B. One of them will be given a flashcard with some guiding aspects they should mention about going to the beach, and the other one will</p>	

	have a flashcard of the same kind with reasons to go to the mountain. They will have to try to convince the other why their choice is better and come to a final conclusion. They will be able to give their own reasons apart from following what they see in the flashcard. It will also be good practice for their speaking exam in the Official School of Languages. After this, the roles will be reversed.
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Activity 3	Time	Group
Going shopping	15'	Pairs
Materials	Aim and description	
– Notebook	Students will take the roles of customer and shopping assistant. The shopping assistants will have to think of the product they are trying to buy: what it costs, what you can use it for, the description of the object, if it is exclusive, if you can use it more than once... and while answering the customer's questions, they will try to convince them to buy it. The roles will be reversed for the next round. With this activity they will not only be able to be creative, but they will also work with the vocabulary they have learned throughout the unit and thus will acquire it in a deeper level.	

Activity 4	Time	Group
Holidays!	10'	Pairs
Materials	Aim and description	
– Notebook	Both students will talk about a place they would like to visit and imagine their ideal holidays. They can talk about how long they will stay there, where they will be staying, who they want to go with, the different places they would like to visit, if they have been there before, why they want to go there... Their interlocutor is free to ask questions if they want to know or clarify something; they can also discuss if they like each other's holiday plan. This activity will help students get to know each other better.	

Table 9. Session 4 (50') – UNIT 3: The generation gap / In the picture

Activity 1	Time	Group
Introduction	10'	All the students
Materials	Aim and description	
– Student's book	As a way to get the students attention, they will be asked to talk about their family: if they have any siblings, who they are living with, if they would like to have a brother/sister or be an only child... Then, they will give a brief summary of what they have learned throughout the unit as a group: they will cooperate and say what they remember, helping their classmates. These activities are very important to invite the students to start talking, so they will be ready for the rest of the activities in the session.	

Activity 2	Time	Group
Describe a picture	15'	Pairs
Materials	Aim and description	
– Pictures	Each pair will be given some pictures of celebrities or famous people. They will have to work on describing these pictures to their partner so they guess who they are talking about. They are free to talk about their personal appearance, the clothes they are wearing or the place they are in. When they are done with the pictures, they can do the same thing with people in the classroom.	

Activity 3	Time	Group
I used to...	15'	Pairs
Materials	Aim and description	
– Notebook	Students will exchange sentences about things they did when they were younger, taking turns to speak. The purpose of this activity is that the students practice the structure "used to", which they have learned about throughout the unit, and that students get to know things about each other's childhood. They can also talk about their family and friends. When they have said ten sentences each, the pairs will rotate.	

Activity 4	Time	Group
Your family	10'	Pairs
Materials	Aim and description	
– Notebook	Students will work with what their partner mentioned about their family at the beginning of the session. With that information, they will make guesses about their partner's family, for example: their parents or siblings' names, if they have any pets, the type of house where they live... At the end, their partner will tell them if they were wrong or not. By doing this, students will pay attention to what their classmates are saying and practice their listening skills as well.	

Table 10. Session 5 (50') – UNIT 4: That's rubbish! / Degrees and careers

Activity 1	Time	Group
Introduction	10'	All the students
Materials	Aim and description	
– Student's book	As a way to get the students attention, they will be asked to talk about what they want to study in the future, or if they do not know yet, what job they would like to have and where. Then, they will give a brief summary of what they have learned throughout the unit as a group: they will cooperate and say what they remember, helping their classmates. These activities are very important to invite the students to start talking, so they will be ready for the rest of the activities in the session.	

Activity 2	Time	Group
Describe a picture	30'	All the students
Materials	Aim and description	
– Computer with projector and speakers – Video: How to find and do work you love (Scott Dinsmore, 2012) – Notebook	Students will watch a video about jobs, which they have already learned about throughout the unit. After watching it (there are English subtitles available) they will take turns discussing different aspects they have found interesting about the video and their opinion about the topic.	

Activity 3	Time	Group
Debate	10'	Class divided into two groups
Materials	Aim and description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Notebook – Ball 	<p>Students will be divided into two groups and each group will have a specific role: one will be pro university and the other group will be against it. The groups will be given five minutes to discuss the reasons they have in favor of their stance. When they are done, they will start giving their opinions about the topic, passing around a ball that will give them the chance to speak. They can not only give their own argumentations, but also say why they agree or disagree with what their classmates are saying.</p>	

Table 11. Session 6 (50') – UNIT 5: What's on? / The country in other countries

Activity 1	Time	Group
Introduction	10'	All the students
Materials	Aim and description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Student's book 	<p>As a way to get the students attention, they will be asked to talk about their favorite TV series and a brief description of its plot, as they will be less reluctant to speaking in public. Then, they will give a brief summary of what they have learned throughout the unit as a group: they will cooperate and say what they remember, helping their classmates. These activities are very important to invite the students to start talking, so they will be ready for the rest of the activities in the session.</p>	

Activity 2	Time	Group
Dubbing	15'	Pairs
Materials	Aim and description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Computer with projector and speakers – Video: Friends Season 6 Episode 17 "The One with Unagi" / "The One with the Mix Tape" (NBC, 2000) 	<p>Students will watch a clip from the TV series <i>Friends</i> without sound, and each pair will work on dubbing this clip by writing a possible dialogue to what is happening. Some volunteer pairs will represent it while playing the video. This activity will foster students' creativity and it will create a good environment in the class, as there will be different outcomes to the same clip.</p>	

Activity 3	Time	Group
Presentation	15'	Pairs
Materials	Aim and description	
– Computers in the computer room	Students will go to the computer room in the school as they will require one computer for each pair. They will start working on a presentation in pairs talking about a specific country; each pair will state the country they will be talking about in order to avoid repetition. They will talk about food, people, culture, places to visit, interesting facts, etc. The students will place the information they find in a Google Sites created by them, which can be made accessible to the rest of classmates. They will continue working in this presentation at home, for it to be presented in approximately two weeks, when the next session takes place.	

Activity 4	Time	Group
Create a rubric	10'	All the students
Materials	Aim and description	
– Notebook – Computers	After knowing what their presentations will be about, they will work on creating different items in a rubric on which they think they can be evaluated. This way, they will complete the rubric already created and learn more about how their presentations are going to be assessed.	

Presentation in pairs – At the end of unit 6, this session will be dedicated to student's presentations about the countries. Each pair will talk for approximately five minutes, taking time from the recess if necessary, and students will assess them with the rubric created in the previous session. Therefore, the teacher's mark will not be the only one taken into account and students will be more relaxed when presenting. This will give way to feedback in the following session.

Table 12. Session 7 (50') – UNIT 7: Giving it away / Going out and staying in

Activity 1	Time	Group
Introduction	10'	All the students
Materials	Aim and description	
– Student's book	As a way to get the students attention, they will be asked to about the plans they have for the following weekend; whether they are going to go out or stay in and the main activities they will be doing. Then, they will give a brief summary of what they have learned throughout the unit as a group: they will cooperate and say what they remember, helping their classmates. These activities are very important to invite the students to start talking, so they will be ready for the rest of the activities in the session.	

Activity 2	Time	Group
What was the last concert you attended?	10'	Groups of 4-5 students
Materials	Aim and description	
– Notebook	Students will tell the rest of the group about a concert they attended: whether they think it was worth it, who was the artist, how they got the tickets, who they went with, other concerts they would like to attend and why... Even though it is a group activity, students will have to talk in turns for the rest of the group; thus, the groups are not extremely big and students will be less afraid of speaking in public after the different activities they have done in the proposal.	

Activity 3	Time	Group
Feedback	25'	Pairs
Materials	Aim and description	
– Rubric	The rest of the time of the session will be dedicated to discussing the presentations in the previous session. Students will give their personal opinion about how they think they performed, why they think it was good/bad and students will agree or disagree with them, always giving their reasons. The teacher's role will be that of giving feedback as well, always taking into account the good	

	things that stood out using the <i>Sandwich Feedback Technique</i> . The aim of this is to help students realize where they can improve without focusing only on the mistakes, forgetting the concept of the teacher's feedback as a bad or chastising thing.
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Table 13. Session 8 (50') – UNIT 8: Looking after yourself / The rest is history

Activity 1	Time	Group
Introduction	10'	All the students
Materials	Aim and description	
– Student's book	As a way to get the students attention, they will be asked to state a positive thought either for themselves or for the class a whole, for students to be motivated about the rest of the session. Then, they will give a brief summary of what they have learned throughout the unit as a group: they will cooperate and say what they remember, helping their classmates. These activities are very important to invite the students to start talking, so they will be ready for the rest of the activities in the session.	

Activity 2	Time	Group
Link the images to the activities	10'	Groups of 4-5 students
Materials	Aim and description	
– Student's book – Handouts	Students will discuss the terms and pictures they see, linking the activities to their names. Some will be specific, as they are related to the gym or words related to what you can do at the hairdresser. They will try to help each other with the words they know, and they can even ask other groups to clarify some of the terms. However, the other groups cannot talk, only mimic the activity.	

Activity 3	Time	Group
Two truths and a lie	15'	Groups of 4-5 students
Materials	Aim and description	
– Notebook	Students will talk about things they do in their free time. Each student will think of two things they do and one they do not, and the rest of the group will have to guess which one was a lie. They can ask about each statement, and the speaker will have to justify each one even if it is not true.	

Activity 4	Time	Group
Presentation	10'	All the students (individually)
Materials	Aim and description	
– Computers	In the computer room with one computer per person, students will work on their individual presentation, which will close the project. Each student will be given a historical figure and they will have to mention their story, where they were from, main aspects of their life and any aspect they find relevant. They will create a PowerPoint Presentation to support their script so they have something to rely on while presenting. They will have time to finish it at home, as it will be presented in two weeks approximately.	

Activity 5	Time	Group
Rubric	5'	All the students
Materials	Aim and description	
– Computers – Notebook	They will take some time to edit the rubric that was created for the previous presentation.	

Individual presentation – Students will present the information they have gathered using a PowerPoint presentation as support. Each student will speak for about five minutes, so it will be necessary to take time from the recess for each student to do his or her presentation. They will be assessing their peers with the rubric they created in the previous session, which will give way to feedback in the following and last session.

Table 14. Session 9 (50') – Final session

Activity 1	Time	Group
Introduction	5'	All the students
Materials	Aim	
	As a way to introduce the last session, students will state if they feel more confident about their speaking skills than they did at the beginning of the school year.	

Activity 2	Time	Group
Feedback	25'	Pairs
Materials	Aim	
– Rubrics	The rest of the time of the session will be dedicated to discussing the presentations in the previous session. Students will give their personal opinion about how they think they performed, why they think it was good/bad and students will agree or disagree with them, always giving their reasons. The teacher's role will be that of giving feedback as well, always taking into account the good things that stood out using the <i>Sandwich Feedback Technique</i> . Finally, the teacher will give a final feedback on where the student improved with respect to the previous presentation and with the beginning of the year.	

Activity 3	Time	Group
Questionnaire	10'	All the students (individually)
Materials	Aim	
– Computer with internet connection – Questionnaire (found in annex 2)	Students will fill a questionnaire assessing the proposal in itself. They can provide their own thoughts and opinions about the project, as well as if they think it helped them improve their speaking skills. The teacher can learn more about the students and how to enrich the proposal for future years based on the anonymous answers given by the students.	

Activity 4	Time	Group
Self-assessment	10'	All the students (individually)
Materials	Aim	
– Rubric	To close the proposal, students will fill a self-assessment rubric about how they feel regarding their speaking skills by the end of the project. The items will be related to the anxiety they felt at the beginning, if they feel they overcame it and how, if they feel less anxious when speaking in public, etc. This way, the teacher will know if the proposal was successful when overcoming speaking anxiety, which was the main goal, and helping students develop their oral skills.	

5.4 Role of the teacher

As stated by Ruzek et al. (2017) emotional support is key when trying to reach high quality results, and there have been evidences that it is usually linked with a higher motivation and engagement in the students. According to these authors' research, this emotional support has been often identified as a significant tool to make students feel engaged. This proposal aims for students to feel comfortable enough to lose their fear and anxiety of speaking in the EFL classroom, so the fact that they feel supported by the teacher will be an important aspect in their performance. This will lessen their negative affective filter as well, progressively helping them overcome the barriers they encounter.

Throughout the majority of the sessions, the teacher will act as a guide: students will be able to ask questions, the teacher will help them when needed and will lead the activities but will ultimately make students the main focus. However, the teacher will be the one leading the class when it comes to feedback.

As it has been mentioned several times, feedback is one of the relevant points of the project. Students fear being judged by their peers and by the teacher as well, as Liu (2007, as cited in Tadjouri, 2017) pointed out. This feeling will lessen as the sessions take place, given the fact that they will get to know their classmates better and thus the environment will become less hostile. The point that they will help create

the rubrics with which they will be assessed is extremely relevant regarding feedback: they are given the opportunity to know the items required to do a good presentation and to agree on the ones they consider important apart from them. Making the students part of this process, both in creating the rubrics and assessing their peers, is necessary for them to learn the value of assessment and to lose fear in this aspect.

When giving feedback to the students, the teacher will take into account the steps provided by Rigby (2018), which have been mentioned above. Creating a safe space for the students is the first course of action, so they can feel comfortable both when speaking and receiving feedback. Moreover, this process should also involve the student, and therefore the teacher needs to make them feel engaged rather than as if they were being judged. As a final step, it should be emphasized that students can improve their performance for the next presentation: feedback is a tool for progression and advance, not just assessment.

5.5 Assessment criteria

The assessment during the proposal will take into account the students' individual performance in each of the parts listed below. They will take up to one point of the final mark of the subject.

- Presentation in pairs (30%: 20% teacher + 10% peers)
- Individual presentation (30%: 20% teacher + 10% peers)
- Google Sites (15%)
- PowerPoint Presentation (15%)
- Behavior during the project (10%)

Each presentation will be evaluated according to a rubric created by the teacher and completed by the students. What they say about their peers will be taken into account in each presentation, so they are aware of the importance of assessing activities.

The following rubric is the one designed to assess the students' presentations. They have more space for the students to decide what else they consider important in terms of assessment; they will feel they are part of the evaluation process. Both

the teacher and the students will fill in the rubric while students are presenting, and this will be taken into account for the feedback sessions and the final mark. If there are some differences between the rubrics for the presentation in pairs and the individual one, students will have some time to adapt it.

Table 15. Rubric to assess students' presentations.

	Excellent (10)	Good (5)	Could be improved (2)
Speaking skills	Very good pronunciation! Every point is understood.	Pronunciation is good and some points are understood.	Has problems with pronunciation, could make themselves understood better.
Presentation	The presentation of the information is great.	There are some difficulties understanding what is being presented.	What the student is saying does not correspond with the presentation.
Selecting the information	Every aspect of the presentation is very interesting and has been chosen well.	There are some parts of the presentation which seemed less interesting or could have been portrayed differently.	The information gathered was not enough and/or not very interesting and relevant.
...
...

5.5.1 Self-Assessment

As it was specified in the description of the proposal, students will also be able to assess themselves in the final session. The aim of this will be for the teacher to see if the students have seen a difference in their performance at the beginning of the year and at the end. They will be given a rubric to fill in with their honest opinions. It will not be taken into account for the final mark, but it will be a good reflection for the students to think about this.

Table 16. Self-assessment rubric for the students.

	Excellent	Good	Could be better
Anxiety	I do not feel anxious anymore. I feel like my peers and the teacher are here to help.	I still feel anxious sometimes; I feel like my peers and the teacher are judging me at times.	I feel as anxious as before. I feel like my peers and the teacher are judging me all the time.
Oral skills	I think my oral skills have improved considerably.	I think my oral skills have improved, but not as much as they could.	I think my oral skills are not good enough.
Talking in public	I do not find it stressful at all, I am confident in my level of English.	I still find it stressful sometimes, but I know my level is better than before.	I find it really stressful, I would prefer not to do it.
Proposal	I think it has helped me and I am better at English/speaking than at the beginning of the year.	I think it has helped me and that I am better than at the beginning, but I thought I was going to improve more.	It has not helped me at all and I feel like I am at the same level as at the beginning of the year.

6. DISCUSSION

As it has been established throughout the project, its main goal is for students to overcome their anxiety when speaking in the EFL classroom and improve their oral skills. For it to be achieved, it will be necessary to reach some milestones towards this aim, such as:

- Creating a safe environment in the classroom
- Helping students be comfortable and confident in their skills
- Learning how to work in groups and their own roles in the classroom
- Assessing students' mistakes and errors as something that can be improved and as a part of the learning process

These points will help every student, even if they do not suffer from anxiety. The questionnaire given at the beginning of the proposal will help determine which students feel more anxious in English-speaking situations, but the proposal will be beneficial for every student in practicing their speaking skill and gaining confidence. It will also be helpful for those students who struggle with different aspects of the language, as the sessions will take into account the contents learned in every unit for students to review them as well. As it has been mentioned above, the contents can be adapted to the books or contents seen either in different schools or even different school years, as the activities and their difficulty are quite adaptable in this regard.

The proposal at hand had been designed in a way that it does not disturb the students' timetable or the teacher's program: the sessions will take place at the end of every unit, that is, every two weeks more or less. The groups will dedicate the final session of the unit to the proposal and it will serve as a review of the contents seen in the previous weeks. As it is usually difficult to focus on the speaking skill during the ordinary sessions of EFL this will be a good opportunity to do so. Moreover, these activities could also take place outside the proposal as parts of a regular session. Given the fact that several parts of the proposal are assessed and will count towards the final mark, it is less easy to regard these sessions as "wasted time".

Additionally, the activities taking place for the duration of this project are mindful of the possible lack of resources available in the classroom, so most require just a

projector and speakers or can be adapted to other materials. The questionnaires and rubrics have also been adapted to handouts. Apart from this, the fact that most activities are related to games and leave room for the students' creativity and personalization will help them find these sessions motivating, which is a key aspect when dealing with overcoming anxiety and creating a positive environment in the classroom.

Nevertheless, the oral skill should be dealt with in the rest of subjects as well, taking into account that speaking anxiety is not exclusive to the EFL classroom. In order to reach this goal of overcoming anxiety it would be advisable for teachers to implement activities similar to the ones found in the proposal so as to dedicate more time to developing the oral skill. This would help students lose their fear of speaking in public outside the English classroom first, which would give way to dealing with the main issue – the EFL classroom itself. As it has been stated above, another possible issue is that some activities require an internet connection or for some sessions to take place in the computer room. If these options are not available, it is viable for students to advance on their projects using their notebooks, and the rubrics and questionnaires can be handed out as printed copies. Regarding the activities related to videos, they can easily be adapted so students work with these videos at home beforehand through the implementation of the “flipped classroom” method.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The final point of this project will focus on reviewing the conclusions obtained following the completion of the proposal.

Speaking is becoming one of the most important skills regarding second language acquisition. Its importance has increased in a significant way and it is required either for personal, academic or working reasons. Regarding the academic field, it is probably the skill which starts being developed the latest in comparison to writing, listening and reading. It is, indeed, during the first years of adolescence when students are frequently asked to practice their speaking; thus, students might find it difficult to perform well in this aspect.

Anxiety is also a key factor to take into account when addressing the topic of speaking, both in the EFL classroom and outside. It is one of the factors that can hinder the student's development of this skill and if it is not approached during its early stages it can cause a bigger problem in the future. Unfortunately, it has been found out that it is an issue that affects a high percentage of people, and more specifically, students; that is not to say that personal predisposition is not a factor, but the classroom environment and teaching method play an important role as well.

Nevertheless, it is usually said that not enough attention is paid either to the development of the oral skill or the anxiety the students suffer from. After a thorough research, the conclusions reached are the following:

- The problem at hand needs to be addressed inside the classroom so as to try and solve it before it becomes a liability for the student in the future
- There are different aspects that have to change prior to reaching our final goal of overcoming anxiety, such as: taking into account the classroom environment as a key point, understanding the importance of both feedback and the role of the teacher, giving the students the chance to improve, etc.

Motivation is also a relevant part of the student's learning process and, therefore, the project aims to get the students involved in the activities taking place, either by giving them room for creativity or the chance to integrate their personal tastes into the classroom. The students can also feel motivated and secure when working in groups or in pairs, as they have the chance to practice their speaking skills without

feeling as if they are being judged while developing their cooperative and collaborative skills.

In addition to what has been addressed above, it can be said that the creation of this project has been the perfect way of consolidating all the aspects seen in the Master's Degree. First and foremost, it has allowed us to become more acquainted with competences such as the ones adapted from Gavela (2018):

- Learning how to design a syllabus while integrating the curriculum provided by the legislation
- Designing and developing positive learning environments, paying attention to emotional education, diversity and the different capacities of the students
- Fostering the students' capability of applying their previous knowledge and integrating it with new information
- Achieving academic knowledge which will allow us to evolve as teachers
- Learning the importance of following new lines of investigation and innovation proposals, like the one at hand, with the purpose of updating and improving the teaching-learning process

Moreover, it is also crucial given the fact that it requires a thorough analysis of the literature at hand. A review of the different sources is key to learn about previous studies and innovation projects that may have taken place before. This, in turn, makes it possible to enhance what has been achieved in earlier projects towards the goal of improving the quality of education. Furthermore, the proposal designed throughout this project could be the starting point for future research and even the implementation of something similar into the academic curriculum.

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